SAFEGUARDING YOUR FOOD AND DRUG SUPPLIES -- No. 136.

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A radio talk by W. R. M. Wharton, Chief, Eastern District, Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, delivered Monday mornings at 10 a.m., Eastern Time, through Station WJZ, New York, and associated National Broadcasting Company stations.

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Good morning, my radio friends. We are beginning today a new year of label reading instruction. If the home-makers show as much interest in this work of 1931 as was evinced in 1930, I shall consider my efforts well repaid. During 1930, I delivered 35 read-the label talks and told the radio audience many of my personal experiences in enforcing the Federal food and drugs act, and at the same time I told you how to read labels on a wide variety of food and drug products. I have many more interesting stories to tell you and many additional foods and drugs to cover from the label standpoint. Copies of all of my read-the-label talks may be had for the asking.

Now for my story. It was during the great war, Aspirin, a widely used drug was scarce and the price had steadily risen. Then, as usual, under such circumstances, spurious imitations of aspirin began to appear on the market. Your food and drug inspectors in enforcing the Food and Drugs Act, encountered many of these fake aspirin tablets and tracked down the parties guilty of their introduction into commerce. But one particular fake aspirin dealer still seemingly flourished, and his was an especially dangerous product, because it contained about four grains of acetanilid per tablet. That chemical analysis showed. We found the tablets on sale at drug stores and examined them. It availed little to stop the sale of the spurious product in a few isolated drug stores. Our job was to find the perpetrator of the fraud, the agent responsible for selling 4 grain acetanilid tablets as 5 grain aspirin tablets, and put him out of business. I said these tablets were especially dangerous. The reason is just this, the dose of aspirin is about three times that of acetanilid. A patient may take without danger of death up to 20 grains of aspirin, but twelve grains of acetanilid has been fatal. A person might buy the fake product and might take what he supposed to be aspirin but, instead get a fatal dose of acetanilid. Such a person might die as a result. We must find the responsible agency for this fake - for this dangerous fraud - but how to start; we had no clue. The goods were sold to the druggists by a man who would call and deliver from a suitcase. From several druggists, we obtained a description of the man. He was tall, angular, about 50 years old, of rather commanding appearance because of his height, well dressed and he knew drugs well. He could talk about drugs intelligently. Inquiry was made in the wholesale drug trade in the city where these spurious tablets were most largely on sale, and advice was received that the description fitted very well with either of two men, who were known to the wholesale druggists. Having the names, the 'phone book revealed the addresses. Now for a bit of

shadowing. It fell to your speaker's lot to shadow one of these men. I first made contact with him as he left his house, on a gray rainy morning in the late fall, and I stayed with him for five long days, without his being aware of the fact, figuratively getting him up in the morning and putting him to bed at night. I knew every place he went - and I know everything he did. I had the names of dozens of his customers but, more important, I knew the name of the drug manufacturer who made the false tablets for the faker. I wish I had time to tell you in detail of the many interesting things that happened during these five days, but the important fact is that my man was the man responsible for the crime which I have told you about. Now during the course of this work, I found out that the drug peddlar was making shipments of the spurious tablets to out-of-town customers and he was using the mails in the furtherance of this business. He was obtaining money under false pretenses. Investigation showed that this individual had written letters quoting prices on pure aspirin, had mailed these to the customers in the country and had furnished spurious aspirin tablets in response to orders. These tablets consisted mainly of acetanilid; the faker accepted payment through the mails. To use the mails for fraudulent purposes is a serious offense. It was decided to prosecute this individual in the Federal courts on a charge of having violated the postal code. In due course, the case came up for trial and he was convicted. It appears that this man who had turned crooked, the man who had sold the spurious aspirin tablets, had before that time borne a splendid reputation in his community. He had, in years gone by, been a man of some influence, but he had met with misfortune and financial reverses and had now stooped to dangerous dishonesty. But, because of his previous reputation he was able to bring character witnesses into court and their testimony secured the sympathy of the judge. The judge in passing sentence imposed a fine and a penitentiary sentence, and delivered to the drug peddlar a castigating condemnation of his fall into dishonesty, but the judge suspended the penitentiary sentence during good behavior. It is, my friends, by actions such as this that your foods and drugs are safeguarded through the enforcement of the Federal food and drugs act.

Now, let us consider our read-the-label topic for today. We shall talk about labels on headache preparations. The Federal food and drugs act requires that any medicinal preparation which contains any alcohol, morphine, opium, cocaine, heroin, alpha or beta eucaine, chloroform, cannabis indica, chloral hydrate or acetanilid or any derivative of such substances, must carry a label which states the quantity or proportion of the content of these drugs. Now what is the reason for this requirement? The reason, my friends, is that the drugs named are habit forming and the users of preparations containing them are entitled to know exactly what quantities and proportions of these dangerous and habit forming drugs are contained therein. The law does not require the manufacturer to warn the consumer that these drugs are potentially dangerous. It assumes that the consumer has this knowledge. The manufacturer may not, however, disarm suspicion by saying that his preparation is harmless, or

that it will not affect the heart, or otherwise create the impression that his medicine may be taken with impunity.

Now the significance of this particular form of labeling in relation to headache preparations is that headache remedies so-called often contain one or more of these dangerous drugs.

Headache powders, pills and granular preparations often contain acetanilid. In order to illustrate the dangerous nature of this drug, I quote from the U. S. Dispensatory:

"Two distinct types of acetanilid poisonings must be recognized: - one in which the symptoms are caused by a single large dose, and the other by repeated use of the drug over long periods of time. The frequency with which the laity employ various mixtures containing acetanilid is a serious danger to the welfare of the community."

Acetphenetidine, or phenacetin, is another product commonly used in headache preparations which must be declared on the label because it is a derivative of acetanilid. It, too, is a dangerous drug.

Various drugs---not required by law to be declared on the label--- are used in headache mixtures. These include antipyrine; various salicylates, such as ammonium and sodium; and some of the benzoates, including benzol benzoate. Such drugs, however, cannot be considered harmless. in fact, <u>any</u> drug which has the property of deadening the sensation of pain cannot be regarded as harmless.

In view of the facts stated, I can do nothing less than to caution label readers against the indiscriminate use of headache preparations as such. Those that contain opiates or acetanilid and its derivatives, dull the sensibilities to pain. Those that contain acetanilid or its derivatives may have a depressing action on the heart and many people are very susceptible to this class of drugs. And headache preparations may have other dangerous substances in them than those which are required by law to be declared on the label. Why does the law require a label statement of the proportion of the content of the various drugs named? It is for your benefit, Mr. and Mrs. Consumer, so that you may read the label and determine whether any of these ingredients are contained; and so that you may buy such products with the full knowledge that the named drugs contained in them may be dangerous when not used with caution and with due regard to the injury which each is capable of doing.

Many of the so-called headache cures on the market will tend to relieve simple headaches temporarily. But, my friends, you must recognize the danger attending the use of these preparations and their limitations. Headache remedies simply relieve the pain of the headache temporarily and do not eradicate the cause or effect a cure. You should remember that headaches may result from many causes, such as head injury, eye strain, gastro-intestinal disturbances, nervous disorders. Headache remedies will

not cure any of these conditions.

You should remember that headaches may be the initial symptom of some acute diseases. When you take a headache remedy, you may be obscuring or masking important symptoms of disease with resultant dangerous delay in beginning proper treatment for that disease.

There are five general types of headache preparations which may be listed as follows: (1) Anodynes, (2) Laxatives, (3) Antacids, (4) Combination of the foregoing, (5) Counterirritants, such as Poultices, Plasters, Salves, Liniments and Inhalants.

An anodyne is an agent which tends to relieve pain by blunting or diminishing one's sensibilities to pain, hence an anodyne is anything that calms or comforts the feelings. Most common headache anodynes are aspirin, acetanilid and its derivatives, acetphenetidin or phenacetin, and antipyrine. These preparations act on the nerve centers to deaden and depress the feeling of pain.

Laxatives are often represented as cures for headaches. When headaches are the result of temporary constipation, a laxative may, by evacuating the intestines, relieve some of the conditions which cause the headache, and therefore may also relieve the headache, but laxatives will not relieve headaches which result from other causes. These may relieve a headache only when it is due to temporary constipation.

The third common type of headache preparation usually contains an antacid, the most common of which are sodium bicarbonate and milk of magnesia. Preparations containing antacids are effective in the relief of headaches only when the headache results from excessive acidity of the stomach secretions. They act by neutralizing the excess acidity and they also may have a slight laxative effect.

The fourth type of the commercial headache preparations on the market are combinations of the three types already named.

A fifth type is the type which is used externally. Such preparations are intended to act as counterirritants and stimulate the circulation of the blood in the portions of the body where applied, and sometimes these tend to relieve temporarily some headaches. Examples of such preparations are salves and liniments, plasters, hot and cold compresses and preparations intended to relieve nasal congestion, such as sprays and inhalants.

If your headache is caused by eye strain, you had better see an oculist. If it is caused by lack of rest, take a nap. If it is caused by working in dimly lighted or poorly ventilated rooms or by other external conditions, correct these conditions. If your sleeping room is improperly ventilated, provide more fresh air, as such simple expedients

are often excellent for simple headache not caused by definite body ailments. If your headache is caused by intestinal trouble or nervous disorders or any one of a dozen or more maladies which should be treated at the source, then see your physician, for you will rely at your peril on temporary relief obtained from so-called headache cures.

In the purchase and use of all medicinal preparations you should use good judgment, good common sense and, my friends, read labels, for any warning they may furnish as to the nature of the product you are taking for a headache.

I have told you repeatedly that the food and drugs act prohibits labels on patent medicines from making any false and fraudulent claims of therapeutic value. I regret that I cannot tell you that labels on headache remedies always stay within the limits of strict truth with respect to curative claims. Notwithstanding that scores of manufacturers of such preparations have been prosecuted for violating the food and drugs act, there are still on the market many such preparations which go beyond the limits of exact truth in their claims of curative value. Therefore you may not rely upon the labels altogether.

Remember that headache remedies generally relieve the discomfort due to simple headache-- they do nothing more than this. You should remember that you have a means of determining whether such preparations contain certain habit forming and dangerous drugs. Read the label. There is no requirement that drug preparations must reveal on the labels their complete composition. If there were such a requirement it would be possible for you to find out with accuracy what they are made of simply by reading the labels. Hence it becomes more important for you to have a conception of the general composition of these products, as I have tried to outline, and a definite idea as to their limitations, as I have told you, and a certain and fixed idea as to their danger, as I have pointed out.

Some manufacturers voluntarily state on their labels the complete formulas for their products. This enables the consumer to know exactly what he is taking. When such information is given, the food and drugs act requires that it be accurate.

Now, by friends, let me urge you to read labels---read labels intelligently---read headache-preparation labels---read all labels on foods and drugs. I have been telling you how to read labels for 36 weeks, and each week I have covered a different product. Do you want to know how to read labels on all classes of foods and drugs? If you do, all you have to do is to write to me for free copies of all of my read-the-label radio talks. Address your communication to W. R. M. Wharton, United States Department of Agriculture, 201 Varick Street, New York City. I will be with you again next week at this hour and I thank you.

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